

THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION.

Coast opening The Mediterranean Sea is about 2,300 miles long, and is entirely enclosed by land, save for the Straits of Gibraltar, leading into the Atlantic; the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmora, and the Bosphorus, leading to the Black Sea; and the Suez Canal, which now connects it with the Red Sea.

Shores E med W med The lands which surround it are for the most part mountainous, and the sea-floor descends rapidly from the steep coasts or narrow coastal plains which bound it to considerable depths. The shallow passage of water between Sicily and Africa serves to divide the Western from the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Maltese Islands at the entrance to this narrow channel have great strategic value. These islands belong to Britain, and form a convenient coaling-station for vessels going to and from the East. The chief town, Valetta, is highly fortified.

Tides currents On account of its enclosed character, the Mediterranean experiences only very slight tides, which are most marked where the advance of the tidal wave from the west meets with most direct obstruction, as in the Gulfs of Venice and Gabes. There are, however, decided currents, which have, in some instances, affected the sites of ports (see p. 72). The warm temperature of the region (see p. 13) promotes a rapid evaporation, and this, taken together with the fact that the supply of fresh water received from the rivers is relatively small (see p. 11), renders the sea remarkably saline, and so lowers its waters that surface currents flow into it from the Atlantic Ocean and Black Sea.

sea-produce The warm temperature of the sea has encouraged the growth of corals and sponges, which are made by little animals that cannot live in cold water, and the collection and cleansing of these articles give rise to important industries around the Ægean Sea and off the coasts of Italy and Algeria. The sea is also well supplied with such fish as sardines, anchovy, and tunny, which last is a very large fish caught chiefly off the coasts of Sardinia and Sicily.

Scenery The beauty of the Mediterranean depends on the deep-blue colour of the sea, the pure, dry, sunny atmosphere, the picturesque nature of the diversified northern coast, and the subtropical vegetation, which prevails wherever the natural or artificial water-supply is sufficient. The region is, moreover, of great historic interest, for around its shores lived some of the earliest civilized nations of the world, and mainly by means of its waters commerce was carried on between South-Eastern Asia and Europe throughout medieval times.